

# **JOURNALISM AS A WINDOW OR AS A SOCIALLY-ENGAGED AGENT? THE NECESSARY ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PUBLIC-SERVICE JOURNALISM OF TVE IN SPAIN.**

## **1. Introduction: public-service media and the Welfare State: a necessary alliance with citizens**

There currently exists a solid academic and professional consensus – backed by the reports of the European Commission for 1998 and the Parliamentary Assembly of 2004 (Jakubowicz, 2010:11) – on the vital role that public-service radio and television broadcasting companies play in the European Welfare State model. According to Michalis (2010:36), Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) became a feature of the post-war Keynesian welfare order where the interventionist state assumed an extensive role in socio-economic life by directly producing and supplying goods and services. Likewise, observers and analysts also coincide in pointing out that during the 1980s there was an ideological pro-market shift that threatened the development and even the survival of PSB. Carcoran (2010:76-78) concludes that several factors have led to a “democratic deficit” in European institutions: what is involved is a space that is less visible to citizens and, therefore, governments “free themselves” from the constraints stemming from popular scrutiny in their countries of origin, where lobbies with sectoral interests operate more effectively.

If PSB has felt threatened for many years, the reduction plans implemented by European states for consolidating the shortfall in tax revenue in 2010 have had a slimming effect on the Welfare State, as well as showing that the question is not only of PSB as a pillar of the Welfare State, but also the fact that it is the Welfare State itself that needs to be defended nowadays. Hence, it is now more urgently necessary than ever that PSB contributes to creating a European public sphere that offers greater transparency and citizen participation in the decisions made by the European government, thus helping to correct the existing imbalances between powerful lobbies and civil society. In this task, PSB or Public Service Media (PSM) has a greater capacity than the commercial media, the majority of which are in the hands of large economic groups for which neither the democratizing role nor public service is a priority (see Herman and McChesney, 1999, or McChesney, 2008)<sup>1</sup>. Nuria Almirón (2010: 4) argues that the commercial media have become financialized, since progressive borrowing without precedents, the disembarking of actors related to global finance (i.e., investment banks) in the ownership structure of the chief communication groups, and the direct influence of financial institutions on boards of directors have all become part and parcel of their commercial activities.

This paper explores the hypothesis that PSB, and specifically the Spanish Broadcasting Company (TVE), should interiorize and socialize a media concept that establishes them as agents of civil society. As Lowe and Palokangas (2010: 138) argue, “PSB’s position as a civil society organization independent of both the state and the marketplace is the most significant of its brand assets”. Section 3 of this paper is dedicated to describing such a concept addressing the media in general, but also serving the interests of PSB and citizens. Although the Social Sciences and deontological codes have been moving away from the concept of the media as a neutral and objective agent and a “window to

the world" for quite a time now<sup>1</sup>, it is a concept still very much present in the discourses articulated by citizens when talking about the news.

Section 4 centres, therefore, on the analysis of the discourses of the TVE and BBC news viewers interviewed for the following two reasons: in spite of criticism from British academicians, the BBC is still a yardstick for PSB, at least in Europe, above all because in the United Kingdom, and more specifically in its audiovisual industry, there is still much debate about the role of the BBC and its necessary alignment with the country's citizens, which BBC journalists and the public have proved to have interiorized to large degree. Such an argument is based on the field work with viewers conducted in the framework of the R&D project "Information, Education and Entertainment? Producers, Viewers and Content of TVE and the BBC. A Comparative Study" (Code SEJ2005-02060/SOCI)<sup>2</sup>, financed by the Ministry of Research and Innovation, which María Lamuedra, the author of this paper, co-ordinated from 2006-2009<sup>3</sup>, involving the analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews with British viewers of BBC news programmes and another 30 with Spanish viewers of TVE news programmes, as well as 40 interviews with TVE and BBC journalists. In this article, the analysis addresses the following question: to what degree do citizens see the media as a window to the world? And even, in which way should this be changed?

The following section underlines how urgent it is to address this matter through a more in-depth approach to some of the difficulties and challenges currently facing RTVE and its television news.

## 2. The future of RTVE: powerful corporation or ghetto? The future of the Welfare State and the role of RTVE and public service.

"The democratic regeneration of the public broadcasting company RTVE commenced during first Socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, although the global audiovisual reform was then shelved; in Rodríguez Zapatero's second term of office, a much more powerful 'counter-reform' is unfolding, which threatens to deteriorate the Spanish democratic public space for many years to come." This is how Enrique Bustamante (2010)<sup>4</sup>, a researcher specializing in RTVE and PSB, and a member of the Consejo para la Reforma [*Council for Reform*] (2004-2005) responsible for promoting the regeneration of RTVE, starts a recently published article (2010)<sup>5</sup>. This article analyzes the change of direction between the reforms favoured since 2004 and implemented in the Ley Audiovisual [*Audiovisual Bill*] of 2006 and the Ley General de la Comunicación Audiovisual [*General Audiovisual Communication Bill*] of 2009, which has provoked the criticism and concern of different organizations<sup>6</sup> for several reasons, including the following: firstly it has led to a concentration in the sector, and in fact has allowed the merger between the private broadcasting companies Cuatro and Telecinco, on the one hand, and Sexta and Antena 3, on the other; and this in one of the most liberal countries as regards the concentration of companies with a dominant position in European culture and communication (Zallo, 2010:1).

Secondly, the new law lowers requirements concerning the programme content of the private channels, from the concept of "public service" to that of "general interest". And thirdly, it eliminates advertising as a source of financing for RTVE, which would be good news if the alternative system of

<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Tuchman (1972 and 1978), Muñoz -Torres (1988, 1995 and 2000), Nuñez Ladevece (1987), and O'Donnell (2007)

<sup>2</sup> The conclusions of this research appear in Lamuedra and Lara, 2008 and 2009, as well as in Retis, Lamuedra and G. Matilla, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Agustín García Matilla was the main researcher and leader of this project.

<sup>4</sup> Enrique Bustamante: "La contrareforma audiovisual socialista" [*The Socialist Audiovisual Counter-Reform*], in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in Spanish. No. 172. February 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Enrique Bustamante: "La contrareforma audiovisual socialista" [*The Socialist Audiovisual Counter-Reform*], in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in Spanish. No. 172. February 2010.

<sup>6</sup> These organizations include the country's main trade unions UGT and CCOO, the Foro de Asociaciones de Periodistas [*Forum of the Journalists' Associations*], the academic association ULEPICC, and the Red de Medios Comunitarios [*Community Media Network*]. Their statements and proposals for improving the bill during its passage through Parliament can be consulted at: <http://periodismoglobal.com/documentos/>

financing were not so precarious. All this has caused concern, which Zallo (2010: 21) sets out in the following way:

- ✓ The reform benefits above all the private channels, whose excessive number was fuelled by the licences granted by the Government, which has also handed them on a plate the entire advertising, film and sports market.
- ✓ It weakens RTVE and makes it dependant on a source of financing that it does not control, only three years after a reasonable system of financing was agreed upon, and which has already been fruitful.
- ✓ The risk of converting RTVE, which currently has the highest audience ratings thanks to its quality, into a minority channel, centred on news programmes, documentaries, Spanish series, minority fiction, etc., is very high.
- ✓ It makes RTVE more vulnerable. This and other governments could be pressured into reducing public spending on RTVE by the private channels' lobbies.

So, a) if the model to which we should turn has to favour the alliance between citizens and PSB in order to protect the Welfare State and its institutions, and b) if PSB is to serve the purpose of creating a European public space that limits the havoc of neoliberal policies, it first has to look after itself. And its natural ally is that which it serves, that which benefits from a welfare state: the citizens and civil society.

What follows is a brief analysis of some of the factors characterizing the current relationship between RTVE and Spanish citizenry. It is possible to summarize that RTVE has a negative legacy in this respect, and is doing its utmost to redress this, although these efforts might be undermined by the Government's new pro-market attitude reflected in the regulatory changes introduced in 2009.

On the one hand, TVE, as the flagship of the RTVE Corporation, has been leading audience ratings for some time now, as well as having received a large number of national and international awards: at the XII Premios de la Academia Española [12<sup>th</sup> Spanish Academy Awards], the channel received 15 of the 19 awards; the best news programme in the world, according to the academic institute Media Tenor (2009); and three awards at the New York International Film and TV Festival<sup>7</sup>. Achievements like these, which have been covered by the media, could contribute to improving the media image of RTVE, provided that the public broadcasting company manages to maintain standards. As Zallo has done, this could be interpreted as the product of the reform introduced in 2004, whose continuity is now in doubt.

Likewise, there is the relationship that RTVE journalists have with their audience, presented in the conclusions of the research project comparing the discourses of BBC and TVE news programme journalists and viewers<sup>8</sup>. Different theoreticians (for instance, Gans, 1979, or Helland, 1998) have established that, at least in a traditional way, journalists have understood the Parliament, media competitors, and, later on, audience ratings as quality indicators of their work. In the Spanish case, this could be especially detrimental to the morale of RTVE journalists, since, as Bustamante (2006: 259) indicated, one of the trends that has repeated itself during different democratic governments is the fact that the Parliamentary Commissions on TVE have only served to highlight the confrontation between the Government and the opposition parties, without this having had a positive impact on the public service (Ibid.: 89, 137 y 193).

As regards the press, the negative image of the RTVE Corporation dates back to before the Transition (Palacio, 2001: 86-88). And over the last few years the situation has only got worse in the context of television, in which RTVE not only has had to compete with four private television channels, but also with the media corporations of which they form a part (or with which they have strong links) that also own newspapers and radio stations and, as with television itself, are opinion leaders. On the contrary, Spanish public service radio and television (RNE and TVE) lack resources that could be seen as "natural allies".

<sup>7</sup> For the series *Águila Roja*, the telefilm *23-F: El día más difícil del Rey*, and the documentary report *Un día en el Bulli*.

<sup>8</sup> See Footnote 2.

The third factor when evaluating RTVE lies in audience ratings, fundamental for its financing, but also for defending itself against the criticism of the Comisión de Seguimiento del Parlamento [*Parliamentary Monitoring Commission*] and the press. For the most part, vehicles of civil representation, such as the Parliament, the media and audience ratings, have not taken a civil and democratizing approach to public service when conducting this evaluation and its contamination by partisan and commercial interests has been seen as an obstacle to its goals by TVE journalists (Lamuedra and Lara, 2009:45-48). This, in addition, has led to the existence of a problematic relationship among these journalists, who only see citizens through the concave mirrors that these vehicles offer them.

Along these lines, the relationship between BBC journalists and citizens, and what the former think about the latter, could be used as a yardstick for TVE. The BBC is immersed in a strategy geared to strengthening its relationship with citizens which, judging by their discourses, the news professionals share and have interiorized to great extent (Ibid). At the same time BBC journalists are obliged by the public broadcasting company to confront their worldview with that of their audience by means of daily reports on audience ratings, more in-depth one-off reports conducted using a qualitative methodology and direct contact with viewers via email and blogging. Likewise, the BBC journalists interviewed felt protected by their institutional machinery in carrying out their mission of public service, while TVE journalists felt frustrated by the lack of coincidence between the deontological requirements of their profession and public service, with which they identified themselves, and an institutional structure keyed to other ends. In this sense, TVE journalists tended to agree that more impartiality and less commercialism were needed. Best research, and more varied sources, issues and perspectives, as well as less anecdotic news and repetition were also called for by TVE news professionals (Callejo, Lamuedra and García Matilla, 2010, at press).

In other words, what differentiated the discourses of TVE and BBC journalists was not at all the interiorization of the public service mission, since this was something that both collectives had in common. There were three differences, all related to a certain degree: firstly, RTVE suffered from an organizational structure geared to public service that supported the professional convictions of its journalists; secondly, the journalists had a conflictive relationship with the images they received from “citizens”; and thirdly – as will be seen shortly – their view of the profession was closer to the traditional hegemonic concept of journalism, according to Carpentier’s model, than to the counter-hegemonic model.

On the other hand, Spanish citizens did not seem to think that the information services that RTVE offered them were very different from those of the commercial channels, other than having a more sober and serious format and less sensationalist content with a lower factor of entertainment (Ibid). Along these lines, the viewers interviewed stated that RTVE’s news programmes still showed a certain partiality towards the Government, although some of the interviewees specified that this was to lesser degree than in previous years, as will be shown below. The interviewees did not seem to remember any case in which RTVE had sided with citizens against the Government, as sometimes happens in the United Kingdom when dealing with the coverage of the war in Iraq (Ibid). In the United Kingdom, there exists a greater consensus on extolling the public service provided by the BBC and its news services (García Matilla and Retis, 2010, at press), which not only stand out by being less sensationalist, but also for their “excellent professionalism” and “impartiality”, as will be discussed shortly. The close relationship between the BBC and citizens is explained by and visualized in the contract paid though the license fee.

Nevertheless, during the last few years, progress has been made in creating institutional elements that standardize good practices and clearly orientate them towards public service. Along these lines, two important things have been achieved, both under the umbrella of the Ley Audiovisual [*Audiovisual Bill*] of 2006. Firstly, the Estatuto de Información de la Corporación RTVE [*Editorial Statute of RTVE*] (2008) has been regarded as a tool that the corporation’s workers have been vindicating for the last 20 years, whose task is to develop their rights and obligations as journalists (Díaz Arias<sup>9</sup>, 2008: 1).

<sup>9</sup> Díaz Arias is an outstanding academician who has worked for 30 years as a journalist at TVE. He was a member of the Editorial Commission of the Statute and as such took part in the rounds of negotiations held since the 1980s.

Secondly, the Consejos de Informativos de la Corporación RTVE [*Editorial Councils of RTVE*] (TVE, RNE, iRTVE), which came into being two years ago, are governed by Article 1 of the Statute: “As organisms of participation keyed to guaranteeing internal control and protection of the corporation’s audiovisual information professionals.”

The announcement of the corporation’s style guide in 2010, however, has been seen by the Consejo de Informativos [*News Programme Council*] and the proponents of the Statute as an imposition from above. The Consejo de Informativos [*News Programme Council*] has filed a formal complaint because none of its proposals have been taken into account when preparing the final draft of the document, which it considers to be “plagued with errors”. In addition, Rafael Díaz Arias(2010)<sup>10</sup> has lamented the fact that the commission responsible for drafting the document has not interacted with the different newsrooms, has not taken into account the work of the Consejo de Informativos [*News Programme Council*], and has not been used for opening discussions and organizing seminars among the professionals working at RTVE.

RTVE could also use the recently regulated Right to Access to publically owned media for social collectives as a way of strengthening its ties with civil society. The Right to Access is contained in Article 20.3 of the Spanish Constitution of 1976, and after a delay of over 30 years, it was finally put into effect in January 2009: nevertheless, this right has not been publicized and, as a result, the groups that could take advantage of it are not doing so.

That RTVE still has a long way to go as regards creating an organizational structure geared to public service is clearly seen in the fact that the statute, or style guide, is not available on the corporation’s website. This lack of transparency is in stark contrast with the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines, which are not only subject to permanent debate and updating within the BBC, but are also available to the public. It is also very significant that the public can lodge a complaint on the website of the BBC, via the Editorial Guidelines section, in which the principle of accountability – the “obligation to account for one’s actions vis-à-vis the public” – is explained.

It is possible to conclude that TVE currently finds itself at a decisive crossroads, given that the reforms implemented since 2004 are obtaining results that citizens are beginning to notice, and, above all, have allowed for the foundations to be laid for the creation of a professional structure approved by consensus that, after decades, will help to support a corporation geared to the needs of the country’s citizens, although with advances and setbacks.

Differentiated, independent and citizen-centric news programmes would constitute a very important shield for fending off the attacks on the Welfare State and contributing to the creation of a European public sphere that breathes transparency and allows for public participation. However, the Spanish case illustrates the difficulties faced by a public broadcasting company to meet such objectives.

PSB needs greater citizen support, and the question that now springs to mind is whether the concept citizens have of the media is up to the task. It is understood that to win citizen support and solidarity, the media discourse as an intermediary agent does not work, for what Lazarsfeld and Merton already alluded to in 1948 as “narcotizing dysfunction” in the media system, citizens tend to identify “watching the news” with “being informed” and, in turn, with being active citizens, which contributes to their passivity (Wolf, 1987: 76). The idea that journalists are merely objective transmitters of facts, or that journalism is a window to the world, contributes to the unmotivating effects of the media which we believe it is necessary to correct. On the other hand, the credibility of the media has dropped significantly in the eyes of the public, which is suspicious of their growing alignment with the powers that be. PSB must distance itself and differentiate itself from these media and this trend.

<sup>10</sup> Rafael Díaz Arias’ analysis on the Estatuto de Información de la Corporación RTVE [*Editorial Statute of RTVE*] can be consulted at: <http://periodismoglobal.com/2010/06/18/el-libro-de-estilo-de-rtve>. The style guide and the Statute – which RTVE has not posted on its website – can be found at: <http://periodismoglobal.com/documentos/>



### 3. The concept of media capable of protecting the Welfare State

The current public sphere, that is, the public space structured by the media, has to correct an imbalance favouring the elites. But how should such a sphere be conceived and what social demands must the media make so as to be able to develop and protect the Welfare State? Firstly, the differentiation between a liberal-representative public sphere and a deliberative one, offered by Thomass (2010:63-67), is enormously useful.

The liberal-representative model is based on the following preconditions: it is obligatory for a democratic system that political decisions respect citizens' interests, as well as the processes by which the will of citizens is formed. This typically happens at election times; for citizens to be able to make informed decisions, they need to be aware of both competing actors in power, and the actions and laws that have been put into practice since the last elections. Under this model, the public sphere is created when citizens are well-informed, can exercise their free will, and can control the political elite. The public sphere is, thus, the system of citizen observation. The members of the political elite – on the other hand – are aware that the citizens observe them, take into consideration their attitude, and therefore orientate their actions towards citizens' expectations. This process involves a high degree of transparency and ensures that the elite respond to the will of the citizens. Of course, in contemporary representative democracies, this process is mediated and the public sphere is basically one created by the media, because immediate contact between citizens and the elite is no longer possible.

On the other hand, the deliberative model (Peters, 1994) is even more demanding as far as the role of the public sphere is concerned. Based on the following three dimensions, there is a strong desire to define the quality of the public sphere (Gerhards, 1997)<sup>11</sup>:

- ✓ Civil society should be participative, for instance, through citizen groups and NGOs, which are immediately bound to the interests and experiences of the citizens.
- ✓ The character of the discourse is a central element in the deliberative model. In a real discourse, statements stem from debate, that is, a well-conducted exchange of information and reasoning between the acting groups and political parties. The participants are performing a dialogue, for instance paying attention and responding to the arguments of others, therefore guaranteeing the rationality of the debate.
- ✓ While in the liberal-representative model the outcome of the debate is normally the wish of the majority, under the deliberative model any decision is a consensus which is scrutinized in a discourse. Here, the public sphere is the system where communication about the common good takes place and citizens are central actors, without which this model can not work. Citizens act within groups or NGOs and want all decisions to be informed by the arguments exchanged, before all interests are considered.

We understand that, from an academic viewpoint, this is the approach that should be taken. Firstly, this is due to the fact that transparency has traditionally been associated with the idea that the media are a window to the world, with a mirror that journalists place before the public. The so-called journalistic neutrality and objectivity lends credibility to this window metaphor, which can be regarded as deceptive and an obstacle for social participation. One of the chief problems of the current media system lies in the fact that the elite's sources have priority over those of civil society to such an extent that it is possible to argue that there exists a re-feudalization of the public sphere (Manning, 2001:5). And, yet, this trend has become invisible in a system in which the media function as representatives of the public. The deliberative model, however, puts the accent on the necessary active participation of citizens in the debate and also on the rational character and orientation towards the collectivity of argumentation.

Besides, current technological development has led to an environment in which information circulates with ever increasing speed, with fewer intermediaries needed to make it reach the members of the public, which also participate in the journalistic process producing and disseminating information on

<sup>11</sup> Joshua Cohen (1989), Jürgen Habermas (1996), and Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson (1996) defend the deliberative model.

their own. This so-called “citizen journalism” is a social practice which is becoming common-place and the media have had no alternative but to integrate it in some way, sometimes superficially, in their information services and work routines (Noguera, 2008). In turn, there are several alternative media based on an ideology of direct democracy or “antiglobalization” that, like Indymedia, have gained a foothold in the global media system (Juris: 2004: 54-57). It should not be forgotten, as Díaz Arias (2009: 13) has pointed out, that citizen (or alternative) journalism is not tied down by any of the deontological obligations of professional journalism. However, the latter, currently in crisis, should not miss the opportunity to enlarge the scope and quality of sources that this trend can offer, through access to citizen sources and virtual communities that share expertise and/or commitment in different areas.

With this aim, it is useful to turn to the work of Nico Carpentier (2005) on the identity of the (professionals of) journalistic models that can be considered hegemonic and counter-hegemonic<sup>12</sup>. The author holds that the Public Service Model is situated between these two identities.

Carpentier (2005) begins by stating that the identities are determined by some discourses and positions that we adopt as subjects and that (in the abstract) they provide us with multiple points of identification; although they acquire a certain degree of stability when they position themselves and start to circulate in the social framework, that is, the public sphere. Among these elements there are some that are especially significant and which the author calls “nodes”<sup>13</sup>. Carpentier identifies four pairs of opposing key nodes that make it possible to distinguish a common hegemonic and counter-hegemonic identity (see Table 1):

**Table 1:** Pairs of opposing postures in the discursive dimensions of the nodal points put forward by Nico Carpentier (2005) for analyzing the identities of professional journalists.

Hegemonic identity	Counter-hegemonic identity
<i>Relationship with the medium (professional elite)</i>	<i>Relationship with the public (citizen representation)</i>
<i>Management (gatekeeper)</i>	<i>Collaboration (gate-opener)</i>
<i>Autonomy</i>	<i>Dependence</i>
<i>Objectivity</i>	<i>Subjectivity</i>

We associate the hegemonic identity with traditional journalism and the counter-hegemonic with the new democratizing tendencies related to citizen and/or anti-system journalism. The journalist-media relationship, content management, autonomy and objectivity will be used here as defining elements of traditional hegemonic journalism. The most will also be made of the public-centric approach and public collaboration in creating content as positive values for a deliberative public sphere. On the other hand, dependence and subjectivity are incompatible with professional journalism.

So as to complete the set of professional journalistic values oriented towards a deliberative public sphere, a look is taken at some of the most recent and influential deontological codes in journalism, which are covered in detail in the book entitled, *The Elements of Journalism* by Bill Kovack and Tom Rosenstiel, leaders of the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism. It involves an intense research<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The former includes the Liberal and Social Responsibility Model, and the latter, the following: Participatory-Democratic, Development, Marxist Leninist, and Authoritarian.

<sup>13</sup> The author cites Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory (1985).

<sup>14</sup> The Committee of Concerned Journalists (CCJ), which developed the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, convened 21 public forums attended by more than 3,000 people, in which the evidence of 300 professionals was examined, among other studies (Kovach y Rosenstiel, 2003, 14-17).

on journalists looking to redefine existing consensus on what quality professional practice should be like in the current context of corporate concentration and the progressive sensationalism of content.

The results of this research imply that the practice of journalism requires the sum of deontological values, work methods and companies with a public service-centric structure. Kovack and Rosenstiel explicitly criticize the idea of journalism as a window to the world:

*"Journalists offer conventional explanations on how they identify the truth, which tend to consist of quick answers given in interviews or discourses, or what is worse, in mercantile slogans, based on mere metaphors. The press is 'the mirror of society' (...), 'journalism is the reflection of daily passions' (...) 'anything outstanding on a particular day'. The aforementioned explications make journalists seem passive, mere recorders of the latest news, rather than selectors and editors of information. (...) More than defending our techniques and methods for discovering the truth, as journalists we have had to deny its existence (...) This is one of the reasons why the debate on the objectivity of journalists has become a trap." (Kovack and Rosenstiel, 2003: 58-59).*

The proposed deontological principles are covered below:

Firstly, truth, which is regarded as the fundamental principle and is defined in the following fashion (ibid: 51-68): on the one hand, journalism has to be orientated towards a practical and functional truth. So as to defend themselves against the problems of truth caused by the rupture with positivism, which problematizes the existence of an "essential truth" (although the authors do not explain it in this way), they indicate that journalists must look for a journalistic truth, similar to other practical truths that allow the educational and legal systems to work. On the other hand, journalism cannot be limited to statement journalism, without delving deeper. If a journalist says that a politician has said X and X is a lie, it is true that the politician has said this, but the journalist is disseminating a lie. In addition, so as to be able to faithfully report the facts, it is essential to tell the truth that they contain. This requires the professional practice of honesty and reflectivity.

The second principle that they evoke is loyalty to citizens. In pursuit of an alleged independence and neutrality, they argue, many journalists, isolated from their social function, inform about what politicians say, instead of what interests citizens, or swept along by the mercantilism of newsrooms, sometimes unwittingly they serve the interests of economic groups. In order to counter these problems, the authors propose that owners and managers must be loyal to citizens as a first premise, establish clear concepts in this respect in newsrooms, allow journalists to have the last word, and, for their part, journalists must clearly transmit their criteria and values to their readership. That is to say, they must build an organization geared to citizen service and scrutiny.

The third basic principle is verification. Kovack and Rosenstiel (Ibid.: 99-129) argue that "the impartial voice frequently employed by many media is a useful device that they make the most of to highlight the fact that they are trying produce something obtained by means of objective methods. Hence, journalists that use it without verification methods are immersed in a form of deception. The authors explain that, although the idea of the objective method exists among journalists, it appears in a very fragmented way and no one has yet consolidated a valid standard method as in law or scientific research.

The authors also questioned notions related to Carpentier's hegemonic autonomy: impartiality with respect to whom? And what about fairness: should not the two actors in conflict have the same importance? As for global warming, the media offered the negationists a great deal of coverage, despite being a minority. And what if independence ends up isolating journalists from the interests and concerns of the public? The alternative answer given by Kovack and Rosenstiel to the question of autonomy is to have diverse newsrooms, so that an active confrontation of perspectives can limit the (relative) dependency that all information is bound to have on journalists' own backgrounds, class, sex, race and vital context.

We believe that, if the profundity of truth were applied, citizens would have more elements on which to reflect and debate. Insistence on verification methods would not only lead to a journalism less dependent on newsrooms, but also a journalism based on methods approved by a greater consensus



and more transparent with respect to the general public. This could break with the metaphor of journalism as a window to the world and the passivity that this provokes. Likewise, it puts the accent on an organizational structure keyed to public service. The more visible the whole structure is, the less valid the image of journalists as mere objective mediators would be.

**Table 2** synthesizes and pools together the aforementioned approaches:

	<b>Representative Public Sphere</b>	<b>Deliberative Public Sphere</b>
Metaphor	Window	Space of public negotiation/construction
Function	Function of the media: transparency	Function: participation and promotion of rational collective debate
The media as	Content manager	Collaborator
Professional values	Objectivity, impartiality, independence (applied to journalists)	Loyalty to citizens, truth, verification, independence and diversity. Honesty, transparent research, edition and interpretation. Newsrooms with a structure geared to public service
Other values of the public sphere		Honesty, argumentative capacity, common good, participation

At an epistemological level, the representative public sphere is in keeping with a positivist view of reality, represented as being external to us and which can be reflected and controlled, providing that suitable procedures are used. According to David Harvey (1991: 28-29), Positivism was already being questioned by artists and intellectuals such as Baudelaire or Manet after 1848, a debate that reached its zenith between 1900 and 1915 (with the work of Joyce, Matisse, Picasso, Duchamp Saussure, and Einstein). Now in the realm of communication research, authors such as Fishman (1980), Gans (1979), and Tuchman (1978), who conducted participant observation in the media, developed the Theory of Newsmaking. They described how information is created from elements of "reality", which are chosen and focused in accordance with a series of previously established news routines and values and which end up conditioning the flux of social reality: roughly speaking, these routines and values end up favouring the version of the elite, and news centred on conflicts, about which barely enough contextual information is provided for an in-depth understanding.

The deliberative model also responds to this non-positivist academic consensus on how news stories can not reflect a static external reality that does not exist, and yet they constitute a shaping agent of a social reality in constant ebullience. After acknowledging that the reality is constructed and that the media constitute a first-rate agent, the deliberative public sphere calls for a process that is participative, rational-argumentative and centred on the common good.

What follows is an analysis of the discourses used by citizens when talking about the news programmes of TVE and the BBC, with the aim of corroborating whether they are closer to the idea of a representative public sphere or whether they include the necessary elements for creating a deliberative public sphere.

#### **4. Citizens: most available deontological values and their view of the media**

The following analysis is based on 30 semi-structured interviews conducted both with 30 TVE viewers and 30 BBC viewers between 2006 and 2007, with sufficient diversity as to sex, age, and socio-demographic profiles (See Appendix 1).

#### 4.1. Important deontological principles for BBC and TVE viewers

When establishing the necessary categories for analyzing the viewers' form of expressing themselves when talking about public service news programmes with regards to deontological principles, their own discourses were used as a basis, before subsuming them in wider categories in a second phase, with the aim of classifying them – as far as possible – as being closer to the representative or deliberative public sphere. The analyzed categories were as follows: 1. Values associated with journalistic autonomy and that respond to a metaphor of journalism as a window to the world: objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and neutrality; 2. Values that represent journalism as a participative agent in the construction of a reality. Here, values that make the practice of journalism visible in the social reality were introduced, so as to facilitate the citizen-centric role it plays in structuring points of view. In this section, professionalism, diversity and citizen centrality were taken into account; 3. The relevance of content which was often presented as a resistance to the growing commercialism of news programmes; 4. "Vague" values; and 5. Formal issues. In the case of TVE, two types of answers were analyzed: values that were regarded in the abstract as essential for or incompatible with public service, and those that the viewers used when reflecting on whether or not the news programmes of RTVE were a public service. For their part, the BBC viewers interviewed did not make this distinction since they spontaneously associated the one with the other. A data analysis follows:

##### 4.1.1. Values associated with journalistic autonomy

Impartiality (or similar concepts) was the value to which the BBC and TVE viewers alluded most. When the TVE viewers talked in the abstract about public service, 10 interviewees referred to impartiality, neutrality or independence as a fundamental value. These concepts were also used for rating the journalistic performance of TVE news programmes: the majority (12) still believed that the news programmes were partial to the Government, a large number (7) opined that they were still partial but less so than in the past or to a lesser degree than the news programmes of its competitors, and a small number (3) regarded them as being so inherent to a state news programme that they did not even criticize them.

As to the BBC interviewees, the concepts of balance/fairness were mentioned by 11 of them and impartiality by another 11. The credibility of BBC news programmes – a concept also associated with the broadcasting company's reputation and tradition – was commented on by 12 interviewees. Three interviewees valued the BBC for its independence and for acting as a counter-power. For instance, Programme Coordinator for Latin America, 53, used as an example and milestone the war in Iraq, and Fundraiser, 30, the Palestinian problem.

When criticizing the BBC, the most mentioned concept was also its partiality (12 interviewees). A part of this group considered that the channel's international news was too Anglo-centric and served national interests. To a large extent – although not completely – the interviewees who believed this was so were immigrants or worked in highly internationalized sectors, mainly international cooperation. This last group tended to prefer the international coverage of Channel 4. Other viewers mentioned the Conservatives, the Government and the Establishment as other beneficiaries of this alleged partiality.

The value of objectivity received less answers from the British and Spanish interviewees: in the Spanish sample, five of interviewees mentioned it as a value of public service and another five as a value of TVE news programmes, while in the British sample there were four allusions to this concept.

##### 4.1.2. Values that represent journalism as a participative agent in the construction of a reality

The BBC viewers appreciated, to a great extent, the broadcasting company's news programmes for the principles covered in this section. Professionalism and news programme quality elicited the greatest consensus (21 interviewees). Along these lines, some of the values appreciated by the interviewees included its correspondent network, good reporters and reporting, the presence of experts with a sound judgement in news programmes, and the maturity of the presenters and their capacity to pose good questions.

The diversity of points of view or the inclusion of information on issues not on the main news agenda of the BBC was mentioned by six interviewees. Four interviewees referred to issues related to the international political arena, which received scant coverage in the more general news programmes, but about which they knew they could find information on the BBC's website. Another eight

interviewees claimed that news was more citizen-centric due to the issues the programmes covered and their approach, with the accent on highlighting the implications of news stories for citizens. This view is compatible with other adjectives, such as "honest" or upright (three mentions), considerate (1) or committed (3). For instance, Fundraiser, 30, stated that "the BBC news programmes served the purpose of making things matter to people."

Among the TVE viewers, only three of them alleged that TVE news programmes were those that offered the most extensive coverage. Shop Assistant, 38, remarked that they were more inclusive, and Nursing Assistant, 46, that they were more public-centric. Another two interviewees mentioned that the reporters were more professional and had more experience.

With regard to the most popular vindications, the interviewees called for news with a greater depth and complexity, nuances or commitment. The majority of these interviewees were those with the highest qualifications and whose discourse was highly structured as regards the role of the media in society, both in the TVE sample (7) and that of the BBC (7). They were referring to how news programmes centre on conflicts, thus depriving them of elements of analysis of their causes and context. Several of the BBC viewers – the sample with the largest number of interviewees with higher education – made a number of specific requests with an eye to counteracting this: more research, a more in-depth analysis, more air time for correspondents, longer news programmes and, generally, more awkward issues. Two interviewees in the BBC sample (and also one included in the TVE sample) called for less impartiality and greater commitment.

Likewise, five of the TVE interviewees advocated for "more sources", greater pluralism, and more social or grassroots content. Two of the BBC interviewees also seconded this request, along with greater public participation.

#### **4.1.3. Content relevance – resistance to commercialism**

Eight TVE and 20 BBC interviewees believed that their public news programmes were more serious than those of the commercial channels, in the sense that they were less inclined to commercialism. On broaching the subject of public service in the abstract, eight TVE viewers questioned the relevance of news in which entertainment, accidents or crime had priority, as well as their general approach, with too much blood and violence, sensationalism or dramatization. Likewise, nine BBC viewers complained about an excessive commercialism or the presence of celebrities on the channel's news programmes.

#### **4.1.4. "Vague" values**

There were also excessively general vague values, such as "the explanatory dimension of the news", with four mentions from the TVE viewers when talking in the abstract about public service, and another eight as a value of TVE and BBC news programmes, respectively. These values appeared in the poorly structured discourses of Spanish interviewees over 50, with less formal education. In the BBC sample, however, the viewers alluding to these values did not have any defined profile.

Five more TVE viewers stated that they watched the channel's news programmes because it was the default option, while two other interviewees alleged that it was the "most official" news programme, and another that it was the most "normal" one. In addition, the choice of four viewers – three of whom were over 65 – was motivated by habit. Likewise, among the interviewees living in the United Kingdom, nine of them highlighted the BBC's traditional aspect, even citing emotional factors (like the fact that it reminded them of their childhood or members of their family). Another three interviewees appreciated the reputation of the channel's news programmes, and along these lines a further interviewee remarked that she felt "safe".

#### **4.1.5. Issues relating to format**

Some of the Spanish viewers (6) referred to the sobriety of TVE's news programmes, their more relaxed and less aggressive tone versus those of the commercial channels, or their more neutral façade. This formal value is therefore related to the prevailing resistance to commercialism. As a criticism, on the other hand, six interviewees also mentioned that issues and also news stories were repeated too often in morning and evening programmes and also in the same section: the presenter

with respect to the reporter, for example. This had to do with the format, as well as with the ordering of relevant content within it.

Likewise, 10 British viewers also mentioned this point in general: they referred to things like sitting behind a desk, the more formal tone, or the length of news programmes.

#### 4.2. The citizens' view: closer to the window metaphor?

Based on the interviews, an attempt was made to analyze to what extent the citizens' view coincided with the metaphor of the media as a window to the world, favouring the transparency that the system needs for the public sphere to be representative – which is the traditionally adopted model – or to what extent they question this idea. The results are shown as a continuum: at one end, a group of British and Spanish interviewees shared views coinciding with the window metaphor, others, whose discourse has been defined here as an “imperfect window”, showed a certain degree of reflection, while a third group rejected the model; although the interviewees comprising this last group were frequently aware of the fact that it was impossible for them to escape from its effects and whose reasoning was consistent in this respect.

How has this research been orientated to arrive at these conclusions? Sometimes, the interviewees alluded spontaneously to discourses that, due to their nature, could be classified somewhere along the continuum, but there was also the question of whether the reality perceived by the viewers on a daily basis coincided with that of the news programmes of TVE or BBC, depending on the sample. In addition, questions were included that induced the interviewees to talk about the coverage of the most burning current issues, so as to improve “vividness, nuance and detail” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 78-81) in general. Nonetheless, the answers to these questions were very useful because the interviewees with a view closer to the window metaphor tended to identify journalistic coverage with the represented reality, while those more aware of the dynamics involved in the media tended to centre their arguments on the coverage itself.

Nevertheless, several interviewees contradicted themselves during the interviews, successively taking different attitudes on the continuum. For instance, in the TVE sample, Manager of a Travel Agency, 40, claimed that “the world we see through the news, well, it's the world they want us to see”, and she used an example from her experience as a travel agent: if the conflicts in a country received news coverage, her clients did not want to travel there, something that did not occur with other destinations where there were also conflicts which did not receive news coverage. However, on the subject of the specific coverage of terrorism and politics, instead of talking about coverage, she referred to these issues while overlooking the principle of non-transparency, as if political confrontation occurred in a “reality” detached from mediation. That is to say, in that moment, she spoke as if she had forgotten the experience that working at a travel agency had taught her about the difference between the coverage of a news story and “reality”, and tended to identify the one with the other.

##### Window view

Eleven TVE viewers and five BBC viewers showed that their view of the media system was akin to the window metaphor, as can be seen in the following examples:

*“I think that they keep us fairly well informed. I don't have a problem with that, at all. They cover everything. There is very little in the world that isn't covered. I'm quite satisfied. There's not much more to be told. I say this because I watch the news and read the newspaper.” (Shop Assistant, 58. BBC sample.)*

*“I believe that it's fairly real because in realty, well, you expect a news programme to do that, to try to show the reality of the world (...) They simply have to keep us informed about everything that happens at each moment and every day, about everything that is a current issue.” (Real Estate Agent, 44. TVE sample.)*

Among the TVE viewers sharing this standpoint, there was a majority of older people, with a lower level of formal education, something that could not be confirmed in the British sample. At the same time, among the Spanish interviewees there were answers closer to the idea of the window showing a certain degree of resignation as regards the represented view, as if at some level of awareness they perceived it as an imposed reality, although no less real for that. Housewife, 76, offered a

representative idea of the function of the media, but she was angry at the fact that, although she did not trust it, she finally had to accept it as real.

*"Sometimes I get angry (laughter), I become quite annoyed. That I don't like some things... and we have to swallow them (...) I believe that there are some things that are a bit of a lie, or highly exaggerated, or they don't tell it as it should be told... but it's their lookout, they can do as they please. We believe it, those of us that are listening." (Housewife, 76. TVE sample.)*

Another two interviewees from the United Kingdom basically fitted in with this model, but with some or other variation. Social Worker, 56, born in the Dominican Republic, reflected on how coverage of Third World countries, like her own, tended to be negative, a view that did not coincide with her own notions of such countries. However, this did not stop her from talking about news programmes, above all the televised kind, as windows to the world:

*"Yes, that's how it is, because, for instance, when news programmes are broadcasted live, that is what is happening now in a certain part of the world. If I read about it in the newspapers, I see it in a different way, while the television image is that which I share. (...). Information and images... for example, the news broadcasts from Afghanistan... I can see the reporter, I can see the soldiers in the background, it's possible to see a certain area that they are attacking or whatever... that's the image that I have." (Social Worker, 56. BBC sample.)*

The view offered by Chemical Engineer, 65, reinforces the idea that audiovisual information entails the window view. This is a reminder that television can be seen as the triumph of the myth of objectivity (Ferrés, 1994: 61-75).

Sometimes, when news is simply narrated, without the support of video footage, it seems somehow incomplete. But if you see images, it has a greater impact. Everything should be included.

*Q: ¿Do you believe that the news is politically influenced?*

*A: Yes. Not directly by the Government. But all the channels, when broadcasting a news story, offer a hidden conclusion. Without being explicit, it is the conclusion at which you are invited to arrive by the presentation of the facts. There's a murder, the police arrest someone, you deduce that he did it, but they don't say as much, they wouldn't dare. (Chemical Engineer, 65. BBC sample.)*

Chemical Engineer also seemed to sense that the neutrality is only affected, each news story arriving at an implicit conclusion that the journalistic discourse does not dare to offer.

### Imperfect window

Another group, comprising five TVE viewers and five BBC viewers, defended a position that is still closer to the window metaphor, although imperfect because they maintained that in the content selection process unnecessary news items were included and others left out, or that the approach used was unsuitable. Among the TVE viewers, for example, Lawyer, 35, reflected on the dearth of information on middle-class citizens. Among the BBC viewers, two of the interviewees, Job Centre Worker, 35, and Teacher, 42, believed that if the editor did not edit so much and showed more footage, a certain amount of partiality that they had noted in international news could be somehow erased. This indicated a certain amount of reflection, although they continued to believe that the footage itself represented the reality, thus demonstrating a positivist idea that the reality is out there and can be shown.

Nonetheless, even in the views of the media that were not especially developed or structured, it was possible to observe – as has been seen in the case of Housewife, 76 – a certain tendency to understand that the media contribute to shaping our worldview, whatever faults are found with the reality. For instance, Research Geologist, 30, stated that the two-party representation of the Spanish political system in news programmes had an influence on society. Or in the case of the British interviewee, Interior Decorator, 28, who, although he trusted the way in which the media "represented" the reality, criticized the coverage of global warming in the media in general:



*"Sometimes, global warming is attributed to things for which we are not totally responsible. I believe that there are things on which measures should be taken, before pointing the finger at your car or affairs as a citizen. Prohibiting car racing and concentrating on things that generate unnecessary carbon emissions, before sticking their finger in people's eyes for the daily use of things (...) I believe that they insist and insist, more and more... Too much." (Interior Decorator, 28. BBC sample.)*

Interior Decorator, 28, perceived that the news programmes' approach had consequences – in some way or another – for the rights and obligations demanded of normal citizens. What he did not reveal was who was demanding such a thing.

#### Journalism as a building agent of social reality

The largest group of interviewees, comprising 14 TVE viewers and 21 BBC viewers, proved to have a view much closer to the idea that the media contribute to shaping the notion citizens have of what happens and, in this way, exert an influence on "social reality":

*"Sometime, I think that the news makes people believe that they know what is really happening, but this isn't true. Sometimes, news stories exaggerate how badly we live, the crisis in Spain, I think that journalists exaggerate a bit or try to get the most out of the story. In reality, things are different from what they are saying. People go out and live better than how this is shown on the news. That gives a bad image of the country and I don't believe it's exactly like that (...) I don't think it's good for people. People who don't know differently will think everything's like that." (Shop Assistant, 38. TVE sample.)*

Again, Shop Assistant, of Moroccan extraction, thought that this coverage was not positive for the majority of citizens, but she did not explain whether this state of affairs served the interests of specific actors. Among the BBC interviewees, the discourse most commonly used to explain why news stories were a long way from "reality" as they perceived it revolved around the idea that the BBC's international coverage was partial and too Anglo-centric. This was the discourse used by 19 interviewees, of which 16 proved to have a concept closer to construction and three to the imperfect window. Among the immigrants and international sector workers, there was an absolute consensus on this issue. Besides these two groups, however, this discourse was shared by another 11 interviewees, seven with higher education and four with vocational training<sup>15</sup>.

Lawyer, 48, a BBC viewer, and Audiovisual Art Researcher, 39, a TVE viewer, illustrate how this worldview affected their own view and how they tried to limit its impact:

*"I think it is a risk [inaudible], so that you get to see it because you see what they show you, so you know about what they show you, so it is not like if you were researching on something, or if you read about something; it is very different... your worldview... I think it is very much shaped than it should be, so I think there is a dangerous thing about that, because the BBC is so English-centric, and... I do not think it is the true world... and I think that, for example, if you watch Al Jazeera News every day, then you would have a very different view of the world than if you were watching the BBC." (Lawyer, 48. BBC sample.)*

*"Although we don't want to, we are all influenced – including me – by the media, inevitably, but I try to be aware of it and fight against it. But when you're in a system, you're part of it and repeat a lot of what it shows you. But I try to have different yardsticks. If I'm going to be influenced, at least I'll be able to decide." (Audiovisual Art Researcher, 39. TVE sample.)*

In the case of the BBC viewers, three quarters of the interviewees with a view very different from the window metaphor were middle class with a university education. Among the Spanish interviewees with

<sup>15</sup> Taking into account the limitations of our sample, from these data it is impossible to deduce whether this discourse was used more frequently by the interviewees with a more solid education. What happens is that education seems to influence an improved development of this type of argument.

a view closer to construction, there were two clear-cut groups: one with a much more structured discourse, comprising people with a solid education; and another made up of people that, despite having a generally poor discourse and basic education, were fairly farsighted. Freelancer, 40, and Housewife, 72, are representative of this second group, with fairly poor views, but who nonetheless were opposed to the idea of the window as a representation of the media. In the case of Freelancer, 40, although he did not construct a fluid discourse on the influence of the media on society, based on certain fragments of his discourse it is clear that he understood that there are hidden powers behind the choice of issues and images which, whether they appear (or not) in the media, affect the reality:

*"It is slightly more similar [to his view of the reality than the coverage of other news programmes], but, well, when they want to say "there are children dying", they show children dying all the time... when it interests them (...) I wouldn't give any coverage to ETA, because what is not talked about tends to disappear. (...), the war in Iraq received a lot of coverage, one of the first in a long time, the first modern war, let's say, because of who they were and why we were there." (Freelancer, 40. TVE sample.)*

Q: Does your worldview resemble the worldview transmitted by the news? (...)

A: It's... a view that doesn't fit many things (...)

Q: Doesn't it resemble a view of Spain or the world that bears a resemblance to what it is really like in reality?

A: Well, of course not. (Housewife, 72. TVE sample.)

Music Doctoral Programme Student, 27, illustrates the group with more structured discourses. Below, she reflects on a journalistic coverage based on events and suspects that there exist reasons of an organizational nature for this, although she is unable to identify them:

*"So, when we are really kept informed, or more informed, or at least the impression I have is that we are kept more informed when something happens, in the meantime, no. So, no one really knows how it works, what is happening, what's at the heart of that, and we are not informed about that. I don't know if it's because no one has information or because it can't be given... I don't know what channels there are in between, but what I understand as a viewer is that I only get to know about bad things, that is to say, when there's a terrorist attack, and about what there is underneath, not a lot. "(Music Doctoral Programme Student, 27. TVE sample.)*

These statements show that the main idea behind the Theory of Agenda Setting (developed from the work of McCombs and Shaw, 1972) on the cognitive effects of the media on citizens' referential frames does not seem out of place; it was even expressed by interviewees with poorly structured discourses. Several more articulate discourses posed questions or pointed to notions that can be explained thanks to the theories of newsmaking on how journalistic routines and news values influence the news agenda.

Two other discourses suggested the need for further research in two areas: firstly, among the TVE viewers, a group of four interviewees were concerned about the effects that statement journalism and political confrontation have on society:

*"It is clear that the confrontation is transferred, it is also evident that it is generated, fostered and then transferred. I think that there are channels that fuel this in both cases, what I mean is that there are television channels in information media that fuel this, and I think, well, I think it's terrible that this can be invented." (Lawyer, 35. TVE sample.)*

The existence of such confrontation has been covered by two reports by the Alternativas Foundation, the PSOE's think tank: "Report on Democracy in Spain 2007: The Strategy of Confrontation", and the

equivalent report for 2008, "Report on Democracy in Spain 2008: The Strategy of Confrontation. Down but not out"<sup>16</sup>.

This fits in with the generalized rejection of political news by the interviewees (visible in over 20 cases), when they were often unaware of the principle of non-transparency and criticized the politicians themselves more than the coverage the news programmes gave them. The British case was somewhat more varied: eight interviewees coincided in this discourse, very generalized in the sample of TVE viewers, and another three replied with indifference, saying that it did not interest them. Nonetheless, seven interviewees, all with higher education, admitted that the political news interested them and that they even enjoyed this type of coverage. In addition, several interviewees mentioned that they liked watching parliamentary debates broadcast live. This suggests that there might be some kind of relationship between the way politics are covered, the perceived partiality of information, and the levels of public disaffection, which should be looked into.

Secondly, City Worker, 35, a BBC viewer, called for comparative research on those working in the financial sector and other sectors of society, for instance, those with a public service ideology. His discourse distinguished itself from the rest, and its contrast with, for example, those interviewees working in sectors related to international co-operation (see Appendix 1) was especially marked. On the one hand, City Worker, 35, was at the very least distrustful of media coverage: "They show what you... what they want you to see... they do not probably show you what is truly happening all the time." On the other hand, he objected to the way the BBC broke the news about the bank Northern Rock, because in some way he seemed to think that in the media priority should be given to sensibility towards companies over sensibility towards the public:

*"I think yes, the BBC News has probably been seen as a public service programme, I think when the BBC broke the news about Northern Rock (...) I think that if the BBC had been more sensitive about how they approached this story, Northern rock maybe would not be in the position today. (...) I think the people have a right to know, but I think that ultimately, it's the Government's responsibility and maybe the BBC is like the Government, you know (...), instead of just saying, you know, your savings are at risk. etc., etc., you should manage the people better." (City Worker, 35. BBC sample.)*

This implies that he was aware that news stories have an effect on the construction of reality; for example, they had affected the fall of a bank. However, due to his ideological bent, and even because of something akin to his "class interests", he preferred that public service put the welfare of the sector in which he worked before that of citizens in general. What is more, despite being his favourite channel, he remarked that, if the BBC were to disappear, it would not be a tragedy.

## 5. Several conclusions and future implications of the analysis

### 5.1. The view among citizens of the media as being representative of society, as a window to the world, is still hegemonic, although very much questioned.

On analyzing the deontological values frequently found in the discourses of the British and Spanish viewers, what stood out in both cases was the presence of values related to the autonomy of the media, such as impartiality, neutrality, balance, fairness or independence, corresponding to hegemonic journalism and the representative public sphere. Objectivity was also mentioned, but to a much lesser degree in both samples.

Along these lines, the idea of journalism as a window still prevailed to a certain extent among the BBC and TVE interviewees, although the majority questioned the model. On the one hand, there was a wide consensus as regards the media constituting the frame of reference of citizens:

- ✓ In the poorly structured discourses included in the TVE sample, this impression, normally associated with the suspicion that the media serve other interests, came hand in hand with impotence: "(... ) we have to swallow them (...)."

<sup>16</sup> Both available at: <http://www.falternativas.org>.

- ✓ In the case of the BBC, the belief of the viewers in the honesty of the public service limited the importance of this suspicion.
- ✓ The interviewees with more structured discourses raised the issue of how they could overcome the unavoidable influence of the media on their frame of reference.

On the other hand, those interviewees with the highest qualifications had a more developed discourse as regards selection processes, edition, interpretation of materials and influence on society, although they did not understand the process and its implications.

## **5.2. There are sectors that call for changes along the lines of a deliberative public sphere, which does not clearly appear as an alternative model.**

Among the deontological principles present in the discourses, there were some that we have classified as suitable for a deliberative public sphere, such as diversity or citizen-centric. In Spain, the discourses were more a vindication than an acknowledgement, while in the United Kingdom the opposite tended to be true. Among the British interviewees, it is also worth mentioning the wide consensus on the professionalism of the news programmes, which highlights the BBC as an agent that contributes to newsmaking.

Therefore, there are the necessary values for creating a deliberative public sphere, and, what is more, those interviewees with a high level of education in both samples called for principles and methods along these lines: more complex and honest information, based on ample research, less orientated towards explaining conflicts, and with more contextual information, above all as regards international issues. It is also important to highlight the clarity with which the viewers denounced the commercialism of the news. However, not even their discourses tended to grasp the epistemological implications of each discourse: the window model is consistent with a positivist concept that the reality is out there, and the deliberative model coincides with a more iterative view of social reality, which requires the greater commitment and collaboration of all the social agents.

In addition, there was a noticeable absence of values necessary for a deliberative public sphere, such as the obligation of the media to promote rational and argumentative collective debate, and how important it is that newsrooms acquire a structure orientated towards public service, or the necessity of agreeing upon a work methodology and ensuring its transparency. Neither an argumentative capacity nor an orientation towards the common good was detected in the discourses of the majority of the interviewees. There were also principles that required more structuring or presence: loyalty to citizens, which was taken for granted in the case of the BBC and which was called for by the TVE viewers, as well as the need for improving research processes or journalistic honesty.

Despite the fact that the majority of the viewers in the Spanish and British samples – above all in the latter – distanced themselves from the window model, questioning the editing and influence of the media on society, no alternative model akin to the deliberative public sphere was clearly detected.

## **5.3. There is a certain degree of correspondence between the discourses of public service journalists and viewers.**

This can be seen in the fact that values associated with impartiality were far more popular than those associated with objectivity, which is even more questioned both in the journalistic profession and in academic circles.

A greater number of the British viewers, versus Spanish viewers, regarded their news programmes as a public service: there was widespread agreement on issues such as their impartiality, professionalism and citizen-centric approach. Along these lines, their discourses were in harmony with the journalists' discourses and guidelines, *the latter respecting a principle they call "impartiality and diversity"*. The issues that received the greatest amount of criticism were those related to international politics, above all for being Anglo-centric. Counter-hegemonic values were more widespread among BBC journalists and viewers than in the TVE sample. The citizen-centric strategy implemented by the BBC seemed, therefore, to be appreciated by the viewers.

In the case of the Spanish public broadcasting company, on the one hand, there was less consensus among viewers about the journalistic principles and values of TVE news programmes; a view also

shared by the Spanish journalists who did not have – at the time of the interview – an organizational and regulatory structure in place that allowed them to reach practical consensuses on deontological issues and a collective approach to the future, which was indeed palpable at the BBC. Nevertheless, there were also noteworthy consensuses among journalists and viewers revolving around the main challenges: partiality towards the Government and the Parliament (although more cautious than in the past<sup>17</sup>) and a tendency towards commercialism (although to a lesser extent than the commercial channels). The viewers and journalists also coincided in criticizing the repetition of news stories and issues, and calling for a greater variety of perspectives and approaches, as well as a more citizen-centric service. These coinciding views are in line with a possible shift towards a deliberative public sphere.

This agreement implies a certain degree of correspondence between the discourses of TVE professionals and viewers. This could be explained by the fact that there exist communication channels between the journalists and viewers, or because both groups draw upon common hegemonic theories on what public service news programmes and the existing Spanish media system are and should be like. This makes it possible to venture the following: a transformation process that reaches the public is possible, brought about either by PSB journalists who, with support of the academic community, implement such a process, or by a change in hegemonic theories (thanks to the impetus of the academic and journalistic communities). And they should change the shared views and functions of the media system and the position that PSB, or better still PSM, occupies within this system. In this process, the journalists and viewers of the BBC seem to be more advanced than their Spanish counterparts.

#### 5.4. What implications does this have for the deliberative public sphere approach?

PSB corporations should take up this challenge because in this way they will serve two purposes: the survival of their legacy and citizen service. In addition, the inherent ambitiousness and difficulty of this proposal implies the collaboration of several agents, especially universities and journalists' associations:

Firstly, lecturers in Communication are currently facing the challenge of developing and reaching a consensus on an alternative model for the present-day media system, in line with what has been defended here. And this requires a great amount of research on the operational characteristics of the media system in different sectors of society, including its youngest members.

Secondly, it would be necessary to educate future communication students in this respect. But what is currently being taught in faculties of communication? According to a study conducted on Information Theory (and related) modules in Europe, Spain and Latin America, the study of paradigms, models and theories related to the media predominates (Vicente y Lozano: 2010, 255-265). Among these theoretical models, the most frequent are the critical kind, which seem to occupy a greater part of the curriculum in Latin America (45.8% of lecturers) and in Europe (38.5%) than in Spain (16.7%), and systemic models (8.10%), functionalism (6.7%) and constructivism (7.2%). The results show that only 6.7% of the interviewees included epistemological reflexions in the subject matter of the aforementioned module.

These results, although relevant, are insufficient. What is needed is a greater number of qualitative studies on the type of education communication students really receive, above all as regards the subject matter that best allows future communication professionals to participate in this necessary shift in the media system model.

Journalists' associations have been working for decades in a direction similar to academic approaches: proof of this can be seen in the fact that neither objectivity nor impartiality appears in the deontological code of the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, or, for that matter, in that of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), of 1986, or in that of the Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa [*Spanish Federation of Press Associations*] of 1993. IFJ has recently launched its "Ethical Journalism Initiative" (EJI), which, along the same lines of the Pew Project, aims to reform journalistic values. In addition, it encourages journalists, media professionals, legislators, and civil society to find new ways of connecting journalistic principles in modern media culture. However, a

<sup>17</sup> This thesis was more widely accepted by the journalists than by the viewers.



quick look at the style guides and similar documents of the Spanish media indicate that at this level the journalistic model's approach is different: among Spanish national newspapers, only EL PAÍS excludes these principles, while EL MUNDO includes them, although in a highly clarified form, as well as criticizing the neutral style as deceitful. ABC and RTVE's Editorial Statute conserve them, the latter because they are a legacy of its previous legislative and regulatory framework. In fact, a more in-depth analysis has concluded that the dominant epistemological concept in EL PAÍS, ABC and EL MUNDO is "traditional Anglo-Saxon objectivism, of a positivist nature, which is not explicitly professed, but which is implicitly present in most of the aforementioned regulations and criteria" (Muñoz Torres, 2000).

## 6. Conclusions

- ✓ The Welfare State needs to be defended and it is in the power of European PSB media to contribute to its defence, forging a European public sphere in which commercial media are not interested.
- ✓ For this task, PSB media, such as RTVE, must lean towards and support citizens and civil society; which they should and can help and from which they should receive support in this common enterprise. To do so, they need an organizational structure geared to this purpose.
- ✓ To this end, it is necessary to change the hegemonic view of the media system, and the place it occupies in PSB or PSM. Viewers are already questioning the current model and calling for changes that are compatible with a deliberative public sphere.
- ✓ With this purpose in mind, lecturers and researchers in Communication and journalists' forums should contribute as much as possible to this deliberative public sphere by thinking out and designing the most suitable research projects and courses. Strategically speaking, the positioning of PSB as a key actor would also be required: for its mission, potential and because it constitutes the chief yardstick of the media system by mirroring what it ought to be like.

## Appendix 1: Methodological explanation of the sample

The sample contains – generally speaking – a sufficient number of interviewees of different sexes, ages and socio-demographic profiles, although it has several features that should be explained:

The Spanish sample comprised 15 men and 15 women, 15 of which had a university education and could be regarded as middle or upper-middle class, and 15 as lower-middle class. As to the distribution by age groups, 11 were aged from 17-35, another 11 from 36-49, three from 50-65, and five over 65. In the British case, 16 men and 14 women were interviewed, of which 20 had a university education and were middle or upper-middle class, while 10 had a more basic education and less qualified jobs, and therefore corresponded to a lower-middle class profile. As to their age groups, 19 were aged from 17-34, 10 from 35-50, and nine from 51-65, with no interviewees over 65. Each sample included five interviewees of a different extraction or born into a foreign family.

In the British sample, there were more middle or upper-middle class interviewees with higher education.

In addition, there was a group of interviewees with an international work profile: such as Programme Coordinator Latin America, Fundraiser, NGO Manager or Lawyer specializing in international law.

Interviewees aged from 17-36 were sufficiently represented in both samples. The British sample also had an adequate number of interviewees aged from 50-65, but the lack of interviewees over 65 made it impossible to answer the question of whether the viewers in this age group differed in their attitudes with respect to viewers in other age groups. In the Spanish case, there were a total of eight interviewees in the 35-50 and over 65 age groups.

These characteristics suggest that the drawing of global parallels between British and Spanish viewers, or between age groups, is not a suitable method. However, the sample allowed us to identify which discourses the British and Spanish viewers used most when talking about public service in general and their public service channels, with the exception of British citizens over 65. The sample also allowed us to compare the discourses of the upper-middle and lower-middle classes in both countries.

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JOURNALISM AS A WINDOW OR AS A SOCIALLY-ENGAGED AGENT? THE NECESSARY ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PUBLIC-SERVICE JOURNALISM OF TVE IN SPAIN.